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Free food, free clothing and free legal services given in Chiefland area;
Car count was 93; 155 families served



John Messick, vice president of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul local council at St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church, and Ryan Greenberg, 22, a University of Florida fifth year senior who volunteers for Three Rivers Legal Services and for other organizations, are among the many volunteers helping Thursday. Greenberg is looking at law school in his future, including potentially at the U.F. Fredric G. Levin College of Law, Stetson University College of Law in Gulfport, or elsewhere. In the car behind these two volunteers is Thomas Bryant, one of the drivers of the 93 cars filled with free food from the United States Department of Agriculture Share Program on Thursday (July 18).

Story and Photos

By Jeff M. Hardison © July 18, 2019 at 10:09 p.m.

Updated July 19, 2019 at 2:49 p.m.

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CHIEFLAND -- Saint John the Evangelist Catholic Church of Chiefland on U.S. Alt 27 in Southeast Chiefland was the scene of charity in action Thursday morning (July 18), with volunteers putting feet on the ground as food recipients kept feet on their vehicles' brakes or accelerators.



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A sign of the level of poverty in the Chiefland area is long lines of cars filled with people seeking free food. Free food is common in Levy County. Every single public school student is eligible to receive free meals every school day in Levy County. Cars line up on the long driveway into the distribution point for free food.



Ryan Greenberg asks food recipients if they have ever used free legal services. He is a volunteer for Three Rivers Legal Services.

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Free clothes await takers.

The United States Department of Agriculture's Food Share Program as well as local Catholic charities and Three Rivers Legal Services had volunteers serving people, who remained in vehicles as they received free food from the USDA Share Program.

John Messick, vice president of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul local council at St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church, said the free food giveaway is normally a twice-a-month event, but in July it is only once this month, to give volunteers a break.

Normally, the food giveaway is the second and fourth Thursday, with food placed into vehicles starting at 9 a.m., Messick said.

The first person seeking the free food on Thursday (July 18) was in the driveway at 5 a.m., he said. Some volunteers arrived early, Messick said, so, they started helping people by distributing food starting at 8:30 a.m.

The Society of St Vincent de Paul is an international voluntary organization in the Catholic Church, founded in 1833 for the sanctification of its members by personal

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service of the poor.

Volunteers for the event Thursday morning included Catholics, Baptists, Methodists and people of other faiths or without faith.

During the first six months of 2019, Messick said, this event at Saint John the Evangelist Catholic Church Chiefland has provided 84,000 pounds of food to people.

There were 19 items in each family pack given to recipients on Thursday, Messick said. Some vehicles included people who qualified for more than one family pack.

Depending on various factors, food items include gallons of milk, apples, oranges, several types of beans, egg noodles, canned meat, stew, frozen pork loins, frozen chicken and other types of food.

Messick mentioned that the Tri-County Community Resource Center conducts this type of free food giveaway twice a year. Many of the TCCRC volunteers also serve at the Catholic church during its twice-a-month food giveaway.

The Chiefland Chapter of St. Vincent de Paul help needy people with part of their utility bills, too, when funds are available, he added.

The Tri-County Community Resource Center, which is well-connected with the Partnership for Strong Families, is a focal point to help needy people find food, clothing, housing, schooling and jobs, because it partners with many churches and organizations in the area of Levy County, Gilchrist County and Dixie County.

Ryan Greenberg, a fifth-year senior at the University of Florida, was active Thursday morning as he volunteered for Three Rivers Legal Services.

He is helping that non-profit group complete work to submit a grant application for \$2 million, which the group successfully submitted in 2012 and 2015. By surveying people in the 17-county area served by Three Rivers Legal Services, which provides help for needy people in civil matters, the organization can better assess legal needs of the people and better distribute its resources, Greenberg said.

Generally, Three Rivers Legal Services helps families with low incomes, but services and eligibility may vary depending on the requirements of its different funding sources. It deals with matters of family law and other civil issues at law.

Not only did people have free food and legal services offered to them, but a rack of clothes was placed in the open for people to take if they wanted free clothes. The church operates a thrift shop, and this is probably from whence the free clothes were brought.

The car count yesterday (Thursday, July 18) was 93 cars, and there were 155 families served, Messick said on Friday.